

LISTING OF THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently Amended) A method for distributing electronic media content over a network, comprising the steps of:

providing a predetermined electronic contract for distributing the electronic media content between a retailer and a distributor, wherein terms of the contract are independent of the electronic media content and the retailer distributes the electronic media content to a consumer and the distributor has rights in the electronic media content;

presenting a candidate retail offer for the distribution of the electronic media content to the consumer;

receiving a request from the consumer to exercise the candidate retail offer;

validating the candidate retail offer for the distribution of the electronic media content by accessing the electronic contract and determining if that the candidate retail offer is consistent with the electronic contract;

upon successful validation, providing the electronic media content to the consumer;

receiving compensation information from the consumer, after successful validation, indicating at least the amount of compensation for the electronic media content provided; and allocating the compensation according to the electronic contract.

2. (Currently Amended) The method as in claim 1, wherein the validating step further comprises the steps of:

referencing, in the predetermined electronic contract, one or more terms for electronic distribution of the media content;

comparing the candidate retail offer to the one or more distribution terms; and

validating the candidate retail offer when the candidate retail offer is consistent with the one or more distribution terms, and prior to completion of the candidate retail offer.

3. (Canceled)

4. (Currently Amended) The method as in claim 1, wherein the allocating step further comprises allocating to the retailer a predetermined portion of the compensation according to one or more financial terms in the predetermined electronic contract.

5. (Currently Amended) The method as in claim 1, wherein the allocating step further comprises allocating to the distributor a predetermined portion of the compensation according to one or more financial terms in the predetermined electronic contract.

6-13. (Canceled)

14. (Previously presented) The method as in claim 2, wherein the one or more distribution terms comprise contractual terms of agreement for distribution of the electronic media content by the retailer.

15. (Previously presented) The method as in claim 2, wherein the one or more distribution terms comprise contractual terms of agreement for distribution of one or more of a group of electronic media contents by the retailer.

16. (Canceled)

17. (Currently Amended) A method for validating an offer for the distribution of electronic media content by a distributor and retailer over a network, comprising the steps of:

- a. receiving one or more electronic distribution contracts, between the distributor and the retailer, governing the distribution of the media content;
- b. receiving a candidate offer from the retailer;
- c. checking the candidate offer against the one or more electronic distribution contracts upon receiving the candidate offer, wherein the checking step comprises the step of referencing terms of the one or more electronic distribution contracts in a predetermined order, prior to providing the candidate offer to the user; and
- d. sending an indication of validation to the retailer when the candidate offer is determined to be consistent with the one or more electronic contracts.

18-20. (Canceled)

21. (Currently Amended) A method for settling a transaction in the course of the distribution of electronic media content from a retailer to a consumer over a network, comprising the steps of:

a. receiving one or more predetermined electronic financial contracts from a distributor, each representing one or more terms for settling a transaction, wherein the one or more of the predetermined electronic financial contracts are between the distributor and the retailer;

b. providing a candidate retail offer for the electronic media content to the consumer;

c. receiving a request from the consumer to exercise the candidate retail offer for the electronic media content;

d. validating the candidate retail offer for the distribution of the electronic media content by accessing the electronic contract and determining if that the candidate retail offer is consistent with the electronic contract;

e. upon successful validation, fulfilling the requested candidate retail offer, comprising the steps of:

distributing the electronic media content to the consumer; and

[[e.]] receiving payment information from the consumer indicating at least the compensation paid for the electronic media content; and

f. referencing the one or more electronic financial contracts to determine the portion of compensation to be allocated to the distributor.

22. (Canceled)

23. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for validating an offer for the distribution of an electronic media content by a distributor and retailer over a network, comprising:

a processor; and

a memory in operative connection with the processor for storing processing instructions enabling the processor to:

receive one or more electronic distribution contracts, between a distributor and a retailer, governing the distribution of the media content;

receive a candidate offer from the retailer;

check the candidate offer against the one or more electronic distribution contracts, wherein the checking step comprises the step of referencing terms of the one or more electronic distribution contracts in a predetermined order; and

send an indication of validation to the retailer when the candidate offer is determined to be consistent with the one or more electronic contracts, prior to providing the candidate offer to a user.

24. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for settling a transaction in the course of the distribution of an electronic media content from a retailer to a consumer over a network, comprising:

a processor; and

a memory in operative connection with the processor for storing processing instructions enabling the processor to:

receive one or more predetermined electronic financial contracts, between a distributor and the retailer, each representing one or more terms for settling a transaction;

verify terms of an offer from a consumer against the one or more terms for settling
the transaction;

after successful verification, fulfill the terms of the offer by:

distribute the electronic media content to the consumer; and

receive payment information from the consumer indicating at least the receipt of compensation paid for the electronic media content; and

reference the one or more electronic financial contracts to determine the portion of compensation to be allocated to the distributor.

25. (Currently Amended) A computer readable medium encoded with processing instructions for implementing a method for distributing electronic media content over a network, the method comprising:

providing [[an]] a predetermined electronic contract for distributing the electronic media content between a retailer and a distributor, wherein the retailer distributes the electronic media content to a consumer and the distributor has rights in the electronic media content;

presenting a candidate retail offer for the distribution of the electronic media content to the consumer;

receiving a request from the consumer to exercise the candidate retail offer;

validating the candidate retail offer for the distribution of the electronic media content by accessing the electronic contract upon receipt of the candidate retail offer if when the candidate retail offer is consistent with the electronic contract;

upon successful validation, completing the candidate retail offer, comprising the
steps of:

providing the electronic media content to the consumer; and

receiving payment information from the consumer indicating at least the amount of compensation for the electronic media content provided; and

allocating the compensation according to the electronic contract.

26. (Currently Amended) A computer readable medium encoded with processing instructions for implementing a method for validating an offer for the distribution of electronic media content by a distributor and retailer over a network, the method comprising:

receiving one or more electronic distribution contracts, between the distributor and the retailer, governing the distribution of the media content;

receiving a candidate offer from the retailer;

checking the candidate offer against the one or more electronic distribution contracts, wherein the checking step comprises the step of referencing terms of the one or more electronic distribution contracts in a predetermined order; and

sending an indication of validation to the retailer, prior to providing the candidate retail offer to a consumer when the candidate offer is determined to be consistent with the one or more electronic contracts.

27. (Currently Amended) A computer readable medium encoded with processing instructions for implementing a method for settling a transaction in the course of the distribution of an electronic media content from a retailer to a consumer over a network, the method comprising:

receiving one or more predetermined electronic financial contracts, between a distributor and the retailer, each representing one or more terms for settling a transaction;

validating a distribution of the electronic media content to the consumer by accessing the electronic financial contract;

upon successful validation, distributing the electronic media content from a central location to the consumer;

receiving payment information from the consumer, after successful validation,
indicating at least the compensation paid for the electronic media content; and

referencing the one or more electronic financial contracts to determine the portion of compensation to be allocated to the distributor.

28. (Previously presented) The method as in claim 1, further comprising:

providing the electronic contract at a central location;

receiving the request from the consumer at the central location; and

receiving the payment information at the central location.

29. (Previously presented) The method as in claim 1, further comprising:

dynamically updating the electronic contract; and

applying the electronic contract to the distribution of the electronic media content only after receiving the request from the consumer.

30. (Previously presented) The method as in claim 2, further comprising:

dynamically updating the distribution terms; and

referencing the one or more distribution terms only after receiving the request from the consumer.

31. (Previously presented) The method as in claim 17, wherein the predetermined order indicates a hierarchical relationship between the one or more electronic contracts.

39. (Previously presented) The method as in claim 26, wherein the predetermined order indicates a hierarchical relationship between the one or more electronic contracts.

40. (Currently Amended) A method for distributing physical media content, comprising the steps of:

providing an electronic contract for distributing the media content between a retailer and a distributor, wherein the retailer distributes the physical media content to a consumer and the distributor has rights in the media content;

presenting a candidate retail offer for the distribution of the physical media content to the consumer;

receiving a request from the consumer to exercise the candidate retail offer;

validating the candidate retail offer for the distribution of the physical media content, upon receipt of the request, if when the candidate retail offer is consistent with the electronic contract;

upon successful validation, distributing the physical media content to the consumer;

receiving payment information from the consumer, after successful validation,
indicating at least the amount of compensation for the physical media content distributed; and
allocating the compensation according to the electronic contract.

41. (Previously presented) The method of claim 40, wherein the physical media content is a digital versatile disk.

42. (Currently Amended) A method for distributing content over a network, comprising the steps of:

providing a first electronic contract for distributing the content between a first value chain participant and a second value chain participant;

receiving a request from the second value chain participant for the delivery of the content from the first value chain participant;

comparing the request to the first electronic contract, upon receiving the request;

validating the request if when the request is consistent with the first electronic contract; and

upon successful validation, delivering the content to the second value chain participant.

43. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 42, further comprising the steps:
providing a second electronic contract for distributing the content between the first value chain participant and the second value chain participant;

comparing the request to the second electronic contract;
validating the request if when the request is consistent with the second electronic contract; and

upon successful validation, delivering the content to the second value chain participant.

44. (Previously presented) The method of claim 43 wherein the first electronic contract is stored at a same network location as the second electronic contract.

45. (Previously presented) The method of claim 43 wherein the first electronic contract is stored at a different network location as the second electronic contract.

46. (Currently Amended) A method for distributing content over a network, comprising the steps of:

providing a first electronic contract for distributing the content between a first value chain participant and a second value chain participant;

receiving a request from the second value chain participant to distribute the content to a third value chain participant;

comparing the request to the first electronic contract;
validating the request ~~if~~ when the request is consistent with the first electronic contract; and

upon successful validation, permitting the delivery the content to the third value chain participant.

47. (Previously presented) The method of claim 46, further comprising the steps of:
upon successful transaction, compensating the first value chain participant according
to the electronic contract.

48. (Previously presented) The method of claim 47, further comprising the steps of:
upon successful transaction, compensating the second value chain participant
according to the electronic contract.

49-54. (Canceled)

55. (Currently Amended) A method for distributing electronic media content over a network, comprising the steps of:

identifying an electronic contract for distributing the electronic media content between a retailer and a distributor, wherein the retailer distributes the electronic media content to a consumer and the distributor has rights in the electronic media content;

receiving, from a consumer, a request to accept a candidate retail offer for access to the electronic media content;

accessing the electronic contract upon receipt of the request;

comparing the candidate retail offer to the electronic contract;

validating the candidate retail offer if when the candidate retail offer is consistent with the electronic contract;

upon successful validation, completing candidate retail offer comprising the steps of:

allowing the consumer to access the electronic media content; and

receiving, from the consumer, at least compensation for the access to the electronic media content; and

determining the allocation of the compensation according to the electronic contract.

56. (Previously presented) The method of claim 55, wherein the identifying, accessing, comparing and validating steps are performed by a reference server.

57. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of packing general contract terms with the electronic media content.